

TYA ADAPTATIONS FOR THE THEATRE EDUCATOR

Laura Ashley Butler

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TYA ADAPTATIONS FOR THE THEATRE EDUCATOR

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BY
LAURA ASHLEY BUTLER

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ABSTRACT

Over the last century, adaptations in the field of Theatre for Young Audiences (TYA) have been the subject of some debate. While adaptations are currently the most produced type of play by children's theatre companies and professional theatre organizations, original TYA scripts are the ones that receive the majority of the praise and acclaim. In addition, theatre educators throughout the United States struggle to produce quality plays with the limited funds they have been allotted. This paper serves multiple purposes. It aims to give theatre educators the tools they need to overcome the stigmatized opinions of adaptations, to give them the skills to produce original plays with financial and educational benefits for teachers and students, and to give them the tools to use in the classroom and on stage. Using writing techniques and methods from some of the best playwrights and adaptors in the TYA world, theatre educators will be able to create meaningful, challenging works adapted from children's literature.

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Over the last century, adaptations in the field of Theatre for Young Audiences (TYA) have been the subject of some debate. While adaptations are currently the most produced type of play by children's theatre companies and professional theatre organizations, original TYA scripts are the ones that receive the majority of the praise and acclaim. In addition, theatre educators throughout the United States struggle to produce quality plays with the limited funds they have been allotted. This paper serves multiple purposes. It aims to give theatre educators the tools they need to overcome the stigmatized opinions of adapted works. Additionally, it highlights the financial and educational benefits for teachers who write their own adaptations for use in the classroom and on stage. Using writing techniques and methods from some of the best playwrights and adaptors in the TYA world, theatre educators will be able to create meaningful, challenging works adapted from children's literature.

Committee Members:

Professor Brenda May Ho

Dr. Lawrence Dooley

Professor Krystal Kornel

Columbus State University

Spring 2019

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Abbreviations

TYA Theatre for Young Audiences
MTI Music Theatre International
PYA Plays for Young Audiences

..... The first step in writing a play adaptation for young people is actually making the decision to write one. Although this step may seem arbitrary by some accounts, it is important to consider the history of and research on adaptations before any work begins.

The earliest plays for young audiences date back to the performances of 16th-century England. With roots in *commedia dell'arte*, British pantomimes combined stock characters, spectacle, music, dance, and the victory of the underdog. In the mid-1700s, actor and theatre manager John Rich began to introduce animal roles into

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pantomimes, such as dragons, witches, and cannibals (Moody, "It's Behind You": A Look into the History of Panto). **Making the Decision to Write: History and Criticism of Adaptations in Children's Theatre**

Jane Moody, Professor in the Department of English and Related Literature at York

University in England, explains that pantomimes continue to be popular in England today because, "Pantomime self-consciously disorganizes the ordinary world and releases us to participate in its magic" (Moody, "It's Behind You": A Look into the History of Pantomime"). The style and tradition of pantomime naturally lends itself to the "magic, and spectacle of fairytales," so it makes perfect sense that early pantomimes were adaptations. E. L. Blanchard is known for crafting many pantomimes that debuted at Theatre Royal, Drury Lane in the 1800s. In fact, he was the sole playwright for Drury Lane from 1852 to 1888. Blanchard is responsible for the first script of *Cinderella*, written in 1874, which has become one of the most well-known early British pantomimes for children. In 1873, he penned *Russ in Boots*, and in 1886, he wrote *Aladdin and His Wonderful Lamp* (Richards, 381). E. L. Blanchard did his success adapting works from

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The earliest plays for young audiences date back to the pantomimes of 18th century England. With roots in *commedia dell'arte*, British pantomimes combined stock characters, spectacle, music, dance, and the victory of the underdog. In the mid-1700s, actor and theatre manager John Rich became the first to introduce animal roles into pantomime, such as dragons, ostriches, and camels (Moody, "It's Behind You!": A Look into the History of Pantomime"). British pantomimes were primarily adaptations of other written works, and most frequently, those adaptations were crafted from fairytales. Jane Moody, Professor in the Department of English and Related Literature at York University in England, explains that pantomimes continue to be popular in England today because, "Pantomime self-consciously disorganizes the ordinary world and releases us to participate in its magic" (Moody, "It's Behind You!": A Look into the History of Pantomime"). The style and tradition of pantomime naturally lends itself to the magic and spectacle of fairytales, so it makes perfect sense that early pantomimes were adaptations. E.L. Blanchard is known for crafting many pantomimes that debuted at Theatre Royal, Drury Lane in the 1800s. In fact, he was the sole playwright for Drury Lane from 1852 to 1888. Blanchard is responsible for the first script of *Cinderella*, written in 1874, which has become one of the most well-known early British pantomimes for children. In 1873, he penned *Puss in Boots*, and in 1885, he wrote *Aladdin and His Wonderful Lamp* (Richards, 381). E.L. Blanchard also had success adapting works from

nursery rhymes such as *The House that Jack Built* and *Old Mother Hubbard and Her Dog* (Richards, 247).

This trend of creating plays by adapting from fairytales and children's stories would eventually find its way to the United States and remain consistent up until the late 1960s and 1970s. Suddenly, there was an influx of federal funding and the arts world saw what Suzan Zeder called a "hunger... for new [original] work" (qtd in Guehring, 37). Then, with the foundation of organizations such as New Visions/ New Voices and The Bonderman Workshop and Symposium for New Play Development, many Theatre for Young Audiences (TYA) playwrights began leaning more and more towards writing original works over adaptations. In the 1990s, as professional theatres experienced more growth, it became harder for theatre companies to support full time staff with the funds accrued from tickets sales. Theatres wanted to produce lower-risk, higher payout plays, and thus, adaptations began to take the lead once again. During the 2013-2014 season, sixty-five percent of the plays produced by TYA Today member organizations were adaptations of other works (Van Kerckhove, 31). This year, children's theatres across the United States had even greater adaptation-heavy season lineups. In Table 1.1 below, I compared the number of play and musical adaptations from various theatres' seasons with the number of original works they would be producing in the same season. Childsplay in Tempe, Arizona and The Rose Theater in Omaha, Nebraska had the biggest percentages of adapted works, with an outstanding 100 percent of Childsplay's season being composed of adaptations. Overall, 79 percent of the plays produced by these top children's theatre companies were adaptations of other works—a 14 percent increase from just four years ago.

'companies weren't scooping up [history-based] properties. They were mostly doing fairy tales' (qtd. in Brook, 'Page to Stage: Turning Children's Books into Theater' – See 'Table 1.1

Productions'). Pasternack saw the market opening up and started to extend the

2017-2018 Season Shows			
Theatre Company	Number of Adaptations	Number of Original Works	Percentage of Adaptations
Children's Theatre Company	5	1	83%
Seattle Children's Theatre	5	1	83%
Lexington Children's Theatre	9	3	75%
The Rose Theater	7	1	88%
Children's Theatre of Charlotte	6	4	60%
Childsplay	7	0	100%
Metro Theatre Company	1	1	50%
Imagination Stage	4	1	80%
Oregon Children's Theater	4	1	80%
<hr/>			
TOTALS	48	13	79%

children's picture books and chapter books to stage, including *Click, Clack, Moo*.

Noticing this increasing trend of producing adapted works, Brian Guehring, playwright and Education Director for The Rose in Omaha, Nebraska, conducted an interview with seven well-known TYA playwrights. He writes that:

A recurring theme in our discussions was the comparison of writing original plays for young audiences and writing adaptations. While some of the most respected plays within the field for young audiences are original, the most produced plays are adaptations... Most commissions are for adaptations" (33).

When Barbara Pasternack took on the role of Artistic Director with Theatreworks USA more than 30 years ago, she recognized the value that adaptations would have for the company. Her primary goal was to transfer the company's focus from history-themed productions to adaptations of popular pieces of children's literature. "Back then,

companies weren't scooping up [history-based] properties. They were mostly doing fairy tales" (qtd in Snook, "Page to Stage: Turning Children's Books into Theatre ~~and the~~ Productions"). Pasternack saw the success of these plays and wanted to extend the world of children's theatre beyond the Brothers Grimm. "The first thing I went after was *Harold and the Purple Crayon* by Crockett Johnson, and then *Curious George* by H.A. Rey. We started doing more and more of these kinds of shows because we saw that audiences wanted them" (qtd in Snook, "Page to Stage: Turning Children's Books into Theatre Productions"). Today, Theatreworks USA has grown to be the largest touring family theatre company in the nation, carrying productions across 49 states and ~~York~~ sometimes even Canada. Barbara Pasternack is responsible for bringing many popular children's picture books and chapter books to stage, including *Click, Clack, Moo*, *Skippyjon Jones*, *Junie B. Jones*, and *Ramona Quimby*. ~~The TYA Canon: How~~

~~License~~ In many ways, licensing agencies depend upon Theatre for Young Audiences productions. By building interest in theatre at a young age, agencies such as ~~theatre~~ Theatreworks USA, Samuel French, Music Theatre International (MTI), Plays for Young Audiences (PYA), and Dramatic Publishing—which absorbed Anchorage Press Plays, New Plays, and I.E. Clark—are ensuring the future of their company and of ~~the~~ theatregoers alike. Carol Edelson, MTI senior vice president, says that she "wants to introduce children to theatre [because] we think it helps create the audiences of the ~~future~~ future... Kids can perform it, but they also need to sit down and watch [it]" (qtd in ~~various~~ Halpern, "The TYA Canon: How Licensing Agencies Build Artists and Audiences"). By the same token, theatre organizations know that the more recognizable a title is, the more likely it is to draw in audiences and boost sales. ~~Green High School reported that~~

Samuel French's literary director, Amy Rose Marsh, believes that some parents specifically choose which shows to take their children to based on the title and the nostalgia it holds for them personally. A Samuel French adaptation of the children's book *The Best Christmas Pageant Ever* by Barbara Robinson has had consistent popularity throughout the generations. Says Marsh, "We're seeing parents take their kids to the theater because they remember reading the book and seeing the play" (qtd in Halpern, "The TYA Canon: How Licensing Agencies Build Artists and Audiences"). In uncertain economic times, theatre companies can count on adaptations of popular children's books to see them through. Emma Halpern, co-artistic director of New York City Children's Theatre, explains that, "Like so many entities in theatre, licensing agencies sit at the intersection of art and commerce. To a certain extent, they're dependent on popular titles to make their nut" (Halpern, "The TYA Canon: How Licensing Agencies Build Artists and Audiences").

Likewise, the current economic state and lack of funding and support to the arts is something that no educator should take lightly. Even with the most supportive administration and parent organizations, the financial responsibility of producing a play can be overwhelming for any theatre educator. Friends who teach in both public and private schools have recently spent anywhere from \$500 to \$1200 for production rights alone, although the more well-known a play is, the higher the rights will be. Coupled with the amount of money needed for scenery, costumes, equipment, and other various expenses, and it's not hard to quickly land yourself over budget...that is, if you've even been allocated one in the first place. In an article highlighting the cost of theatre productions for schools in Ohio, the director at Bowling Green High School reported that

the cost of the royalty fee to produce performances of *Mary Poppins* were \$5,000 in 2014. In 2015, another Ohio school, Perrysburg High School, spent \$60,000 overall to bring *Mary Poppins* to life on stage—a sum that is greater than the average salary of a person working in Toledo, Ohio. Rob Gentry, theatre director at Perrysburg High School, and Jo Beth Gonzalez, theatre director at Bowling Green High School, both have claimed that their “theatre programs are self-sustaining with the support of ticket sales, concession sales, advertising, fund-raisers, and in-kind donations from passionate parents and private businesses” (Cafarello, For Area High Schools, It Takes Big Bucks to Put on Big Productions).

However, not every program can be so fortunate. Musicals generally cost more to produce than straight plays, but even then, schools can feel burdened by the limitations set forth by the financial aspects of producing a play. Dwayne Hartford, Associate Artist and Playwright-in-Residence at Childsplay in Tempe, Arizona, agrees. “The dollars schools have to spend on the arts are limited, and if [the play] can have a curricular tie-in, [schools] want it” (qtd in Van Kerckhove, 33). With these things in mind, educators should take a moment to consider the value of writing their own scenes and plays for use in both classroom work and on stage, thus eliminating at least some of the cost associated with royalties and licensing fees.

So, if an educator can see the financial value behind writing their own work, the next question becomes, why an adaptation? Why not an original piece? Playwright Hillary DePiano is best known for her adaptation of an Italian fairytale titled *The Love of Three Oranges*. DePiano writes,

It's hard to deny the lure of adaptation. Taking existing content that you already know works and adapting it for the stage seems so much faster than writing something from scratch. An adaptation also makes your job that much easier when it comes to promotion. If your source material already has fans, they'll seek out your content on the strength of the original name even if they've never heard of you (DePiano, "Adapt or Perish! Five Things to Consider Before Starting an Adaptation").

As educators, we know that our time is invaluable. It is a well-known fact that teachers spend more time working "off the clock" than most other professions. With our time and resources being limited, it makes far more sense to use an existing piece of literature and crafting it into a play for the stage than to begin the same journey with nothing.

Karen Zacarias, Playwright-in-Residence at Arena Stage in Washington, D.C., thinks of writing adaptations in terms of a buffet:

In adaptation...it's more like the buffet is already laid out for you. Versus [writing original stories] where there's no buffet, but this huge grocery store and you can make anything. That can be terrifying (qtd. in Van Kerckhove, 32).

José Cruz Gonzalez, who adapted the play *Tomás and the Library Lady* from the children's picture book of the same name, thinks of adaptations as breathing life into the words already written. He states, "An original play starts from scratch. You have to invent everything. With a piece that is already created, it's about inventing a theatrical world so that its spirit may shine" (qtd. in Guehring, 34). For the beginning writer or even

the experienced one, an adaptation will save you valuable time, while allowing you to personalize the story as you work to bring it to life.

Whatever your motivation for writing—whether financial, educational, sentimental, or creative—it is important to remember that all writers receive criticism for their work. In the professional world, this seems to be even truer for playwrights of adaptations. The next chapter is intended to highlight current trends in adapted works to help beginning writers create meaningful narratives, while also providing research that can be used in defense of adaptations.

Overcoming the Stigma of Adaptation

Chapter 2:
Overcoming the Stigma of Adaptation

In the previous chapter, I used a quote by playwright Brian Guerhing that reflects the opinions of many in the professional world. He writes that indeed, the most frequently performed plays are adaptations, but that the theatre field's most respected works are original pieces. This is a common belief among playwrights, licensing companies, directors, and actors alike. Currently, the most popular Theatre for Young Audiences plays and musicals across all licensing agencies in the United States are adaptations. However, adaptations are recurrently referred to as "fluff pieces," while some playwrights argue that the demand for adaptations has prevented them from being able to solely create original new plays. This phenomenon is so frequent that the phrase "Tyranny of titles, tyranny of time" is often used to describe it. Attributed to Suzan Zeder, "Tyranny of titles, tyranny of time" is a descriptor used to highlight two main factors affecting TYA today. "Tyranny of titles" refers to the current economic situation and the desperate need for big-name titles that will bring in plenty of revenue for struggling theatres, while "tyranny of time" denotes the need for plays that can be performed in an hour or less in order to accommodate school audiences who so frequently attend plays as part of an educational field trip. Zeder's words have become commonplace among playwrights and artistic directors across the United States, especially those in the TYA field. According to Barry Kornhauser, a playwright whose adaptations include *Cyrano* and *A Christmas Carol*, "We're all aware of the 'Tyranny of the Title,' how it is easier to market plays that have some sort of familiarity to audiences" (qtd. in Guehring, 35).

However, adaptations have not always been viewed in such a negative light. William Shakespeare has arguably been one of the greatest playwrights of our time, but

we can also give him the title of adaptor, as it is no secret that he “quite happily plundered the work of writers and historians” (Gardner, “Are Stage Adaptations Always Inferior?”). The origins of *Hamlet* can be traced back to *Saxo Grammaticus’ Gesta Danorum*, and *Romeo and Juliet* is a clear reworking of *The Tragical History of Romeus and Juliet* by poet Arthur Brooke. Lyn Gardner is a theatre critic and the Associate Editor of the British weekly newspaper *The Stage*. Gardner compares the work of Shakespeare’s writing to two well-known modern Broadway productions:

[Shakespeare] took familiar stories and made them his own. It’s really no different to what Dennis Kelly has done with [Roald Dahl’s] *Matilda* or the creators of *War Horse* with Michael Morpurgo’s story, which itself borrows from *Black Beauty*. Great theatre is often adaptation by any other name” (Gardner, “Are Stage Adaptations Always Inferior?”).

Sean Foley understands the pressure of criticism all too well. In 2013, he began directing a stage musical based off of the popular television show *The X Factor*. Foley was told time and time again that the talent show-style television program was an unacceptable source from which to derive a stage musical. In turn, Foley chastised the theatre community for being too arrogant in regards to adaptations. Lyn Gardner defends Foley’s beliefs, stating that she “suspect[s] that the kind of snobbery that surrounded the premiere of the musical *Les Misérables* almost 30 years ago is long past... [Victor] Hugo’s novel is a great novel; [Claude-Michel Schönberg and Alain Boublil’s] musical is a great musical” (Gardner, “Are Stage Adaptations Always Inferior?”).

Though not a TYA playwright, Sean Foley is not the first person to take a television program and adapt it into a stage musical. *Dora the Explorer*, *Blues Clues*, *Sid the Science Guy*, and *The Backyardigans* are just a few examples of animated children's series that have been used in recent years as source material for live productions. Certainly, shining a corporate spotlight on the field of Theatre for Young Audiences has had a negative effect on theatre world's perception of adaptations for youth. Judy Matetzschk-Campbell, Ph.D. is the producing artistic director of Pollyanna Theatre Company in Austin, Texas. She speaks out for adaptations in spite of the negative responses to this "corporate takeover", asserting that, "anything that children see live, versus what's on a screen, is a step in the right direction...I want kids to have all kinds of performing arts experiences and be able to make up their own minds. Kids are more savvy [sic] then [sic] we give them credit for" (qtd in Wiginton, 13).

Additionally, it is the artistic choices that a playwright makes that can help to override the preconceived stigmas of adaptation. Take, for example, David Wood, the playwright behind the Roald Dahl adaptations *James and the Giant Peach*, *The BFG*, *Fantastic Mr. Fox*, and others. Amy Rose Marsh, of Samuel French, describes his adaptations as "brilliant, just totally blissful and effervescent. He thinks of everything from the child's perspective, and thinks about how children process information" (qtd. in Halpern, "The TYA Canon: How Licensing Agencies Build Artists and Audiences). If our focus, as both educators and playwrights, can be on the viewpoint of the children, then we can create valuable, intriguing, and captivating plays that overthrow the idea that adaptations are nothing more than fluff pieces and meal tickets.

As educators, we can work to shift the focus from the financial value of adaptations to the artistic and educational value that they have. With an adapted work, young people

If we think back to the central core of playwriting, the goal is and always has been to tell a story. Writing an adaptation is no different. In her essay on adaptation and storytelling in theatre, Frances Babbage reasons,

If storytelling is understood... as a practice of articulation that seeks to shape human experience and imagination in purposeful and profoundly interconnected ways, then storytelling through adaptation can in turn be regarded as an adherence to, and perpetuation of, the same desire (Babbage, 1).

Storytellers throughout history have been creating adaptations as the tales were passed down, whether unwittingly or intentionally. We are simply doing what we have always done. Jack Zipes, a prominent scholar and lecturer in the world of fantasy and fairytales, explains that a storyteller's job is to "grab hold of tradition as if it were a piece of clay and to mold it and remold it to see what they can make out of it in the present" (Zipes, 41). Yes, as an educator, you need to be able to draw the crowds in to see your students' work, and certainly, a recognizable title can and will do that; but once the audience is present, you have the opportunity as both a teacher and a working artist to demonstrate the power of an adapted work of children's literature that you have skillfully and thoughtfully molded and reshaped into a viable piece of theatre.

Barry Kornhauser recognizes that there is more than one side of the adaptation coin. "Artistic and managing directors know that... adaptations can be both artful and rich in meaning, while helping to keep their theatres' doors open" (qtd. in Guehring, 36). As educators, we can work to shift the focus from the financial value of adaptations to the artistic and educational value that they have. With an adapted work, young people

are able to see the characters that they have grown to love in a new and exciting light. It enables them to expand their idea of how a character should act or what the character might look like. Perhaps more importantly, the literacy connections that are formed when a child takes something they have read or been read and compares it to seeing that same text translated into spoken dialogue, are immeasurable. Karen Zacarias explains,

Theatre and plays and music are all a part of the literacy cannon. The more literate you are, the more you can connect the words from the book to the words that are uttered on stage... I think it's a really interesting paradigm of learning and decision-making" (qtd. in Van Kerckhove, 32).

This is the way that adaptors can shift the mindset of some theatre professionals who fail to see the value of adapted works. If we can create more well-written, intriguing, and challenging pieces, we can begin to change the perception of TYA adaptations.

If you are nervous or hesitant to begin the playwriting process, then it may comfort you to know that Dwayne Hartford, Artistic Director of Childsplay, was nearly 40 years old when he first began to write. His whole life, Hartford had never believed that he would ever become a playwright, and even thought of himself as a bad writer. Yet, he had a story inside of him that he knew needed telling, and so he did. Hartford would become known for his adaptation of Charles Dickens' *A Tale of Two Cities* and Kate DeCamillo's *The Miraculous Journey of Edward Tulane*. Now, Hartford sticks to the belief that "everyone has a writer in them, and if they want to work on it, then find that voice. Do it. It's in all of us" (qtd. in Van Kerckhove, 77).

Chapter 3

From the Experts: How to Make Writing Work for You

It may help to start this process by breaking down just what the word means. In order to make writing work for you, you must first understand the process of adapting a story for children. This means translating it so that it can work for a stage environment. Other playwrights, such as Karen Zacarias, feel that they must slip into a new role before they can begin their adaptation. "It's like I'm a reporter—who, what, where, when, how. The creative part is trying to find. Some adaptations require you to add to the story" (qtd. in Van Kerckhove, 32).

It is also rather necessary for TYA playwrights to understand how child audiences are vastly different from adult audiences. David Wood believes that every good playwright and director need to fully understand their audience in order to create a production that they will enjoy. He speaks extensively on this in his text, *Theatre for Children: A Guide to Writing, Adapting, Directing, and Acting*. Some key features of child audiences that Wood points out are the need for justice, the joy of being able to actively participate, the directness with which a child will address an actor or character,

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It may help to start this process of adaptation by breaking down just what the word means to different playwrights. For some, it is as simple as taking a text and translating it so that it can work for a stage environment. Other playwrights, such as Karen Zacarias, feel that they must slip into a new role before they can begin their adaptation. "It's like I'm a reporter—who, what, where, when, how...The creative part is trying to find. Some adaptations require you to add to the story" (qtd. in Van Kerckhove, 32).

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their excitement at being frightened (within reason), and perhaps the best of all—their subversiveness to traditionally taboo topics—e.g., “smelly socks, underpants, and bodily functions, subjects that aren’t quite ‘nice’ in the realms of polite adult society” (Wood, 23). To put it bluntly, farts are funny. And it’s this sort of thinking that will help you write a successful play for young people.

Most adaptations today can be categorized in one of two ways, which Hillary DePiano has identified as “format shifts” and “reboots”. In a format shift, the playwright takes an existing form of media (be it a short story, novel, comic book, movie, et cetera), and transforms it into a play intended for the stage. Examples of format shifts include *Junie B. Jones*, *Miss Nelson is Missing*, and *Flat Stanley* which are all popular children’s books that have been formatted for the stage. In a reboot, the source material is a play already in existence that the adaptor changes either by modernizing the work, shifting the style in which it was written, or adding character changes that would impact the work in a new and unique way. To demonstrate the reboot adaptation, DePiano uses the example of Shakespeare’s *Romeo and Juliet*, where the lead characters are zombies. (DePiano, “Adapt or Perish! Five Things to Consider Before Starting an Adaptation”). Bizarre as it may seem, Kathy Martin and Phil Nohl did just that in their adaptation, *Zombeo and Juliet*.

Selecting your source material can be a challenging task for beginning writers. David Wood gives this important bit of advice, “I am primarily interested in a story that will work well on stage, not just a title that will bring people in” (126). As we have discussed previously, although it’s perfectly acceptable to be mindful of the latter, Wood explains that not every well-loved childhood story makes for an interesting play. Gwen

Edwards, Education Coordinator at Duke City Repertory Theatre, believes that “no matter what the needs are of the child coming through the doors of a theatre... theatre artists serve them best by choosing stories that engage them the most... Stories that encourage imagination and serve our communities” (Edwards, 31). Presently, there are certain themes that have become popular topics among educators and students, such as bullying and vampires. As a writer, you want to appeal to those needs, but you also need to create a piece that will continue to have value after time has passed, or will be able to connect with multiple cultures and generations. Karen Zacarias stuck to her idea that “fairytales apply to every culture,” (qtd. in Van Kerckhove, 34), when she set about writing *Cinderella Eats Rice and Beans*. There were already plenty of adaptations of Cinderella’s story, so Zacarias not only created a unique version of the classic story, but also found a way to create a cultural tie-in. She understood the needs of the young people in her community in Washington, D.C. and worked to create a production that would help them feel accepted and a part of the world around them.

Nearly every culture has a version of the Cinderella story handed down through generations, and many authors have written these versions into picture books for children. Mexico has Adelita and Domitila, China has Yeh-Shen, the Native American Algonquin tribes have the Rough-Face Girl, and Egyptians have Rhodopis. India, the Philippines, Ireland, and Korea too have their own type of Cinderella variations.

Playwrights have also worked to create their own Cinderella tales, putting a unique spin on the story to set their version apart from others. Perhaps the most well-known of these is the musical *Into the Woods*, although this play also incorporates a slew of other fairytales. *Sing Down the Moon* is a musical written and composed by

Mary Hall Surface and David Maddox that features an Appalachian Cinderella who goes by the name of Catskins. R. Rex Stephenson also wrote about an Appalachian Cinderella, this time called Ashpet, in his play *Grandmother Tales*. Stacy Lane's farce *67 Cinderellas* features a dimwit prince and a very cunning Cinderella who rejects the traditional expectations that come with being a princess. Chinese, Russian, and Native American Cinderellas are featured in Lowell Swortzell's 1992 play, *Cinderella: The World's Favorite Fairytale*.

However, Cinderella isn't the only classic fairy tale character receiving multicultural adaptations. This year, playwright Susan Gayle Todd debuted a Bollywood-style *Wizard of Oz*, entitled *The Wazir of Oz*. Just four years prior, Todd wrote another Bollywood-inspired play, a version of *Little Red Riding Hood*, which she calls *Little Red Chunari*. Todd believes these cultural adaptations of traditional tales are, "really important shows because we bring in thousands of schoolchildren... [Audience members have] said, 'You just don't know what it's like to be able to bring our kids here,' and they get to see people who look like them being centralized on stage" (qtd in Sjoberg 2018). By selecting something that was close to her heart, Susan Gayle Todd was able to write something that could reach others in her community.

When selecting a story to adapt, keep in mind that the story will stay with you for some time. The writing process takes time, certainly, but do not forget the time you will spend editing your drafts, listening to feedback, directing the finished product, and possibly even publishing and marketing the work. As Dwayne Hartford says, "Write what you're passionate about" (qtd. in Van Kerckhove 37). Hillary DePiano compares the writing process to a marriage. It is a binding process, and if you select a story because it

seems easy, rather than because it is a tale that you are drawn to and love, you will struggle through the process of writing the adaptation (DePiano, "Adapt or Perish! Five Things to Consider Before Starting an Adaptation").

DePiano also strongly recommends doing research before beginning any writing. Playwrights need to know the history of their source material, but also need to be aware of other adaptations of the work that may already exist in the theatrical marketplace. If you find a significant amount of adaptations already in existence, then you will either need to find a way to make your work unique, as Zacarias did with *Cinderella*, or you may need to select another story to work from. With Zacarias's *The Love of Three Oranges*, she needed to spend time researching the historical context of the original work before she would be able to create a modern, more accessible version. By educating yourself before putting words to paper, you can ensure that you will create a much more successful piece of work.

When selecting the source material for your adaptation, you will also need to consider who has ownership over the piece. There are many viable sources for children's adaptations that are within public domain—fables, fairytales, tall tales, and Shakespeare. However, just because a story is not in public domain does not mean that it is off-limits to you. You will need to contact the original author or the current rights-holder in order to secure the rights, which can be a tricky and tedious process. If you manage to secure the rights, consider the royalties that come from productions of the play. These profits will need to be split, and you need to know what your cut would be before you begin writing. Deborah Wicks La Puma is a composer who has collaborated with Karen Zacarias on several works, including adaptations of *Ferdinand the Bull*, *Ella*

Enchanted, and *OLIVÉRio: A Brazilian Twist on Dickens*. La Puma advises playwrights to be aware “that there are risks if you do a popular title. You won’t have control over it, and maybe that’s worth it, and maybe it’s not. Make sure you’ve made peace with that in your heart before you get your heart broken” (qtd. in Van Kerckhove, 37). In general, you will have greater ownership, more flexibility, and less hassle if you are able to find a work in public domain that speaks to you.

As far as techniques for writing, each playwright seems to have his or her own favorite method, which they have found through experimentation and discovery. Wood, for example, typically utilizes one of two methods: synopsis, and working backward. With his synopsis system, he starts by writing out the full synopsis of the story, including characters and any theatrical magic that is to take place. Then, each of these segments are extended and dialogue is added to create a full play. In Wood’s working-in-reverse technique, he decides what the ending of the play will be, or what he hopes the characters will learn from their experience, and then works his way backward from that moment. Karen Zacarias uses a process similar to Wood’s synopsis strategy, except she prefers to do it mentally. Zacarias recommends reading the source material one or two times, and then using what you remember from those readings to write your adaptation. She believes that “if you start using the book as the bible for writing the play and trying to keep everything in it exactly, you lose a little bit of the soul” (qtd. in Van Kerckhove, 37). For Zacharias, it is more important to focus on the “soul” of the story rather than attempting to create a word-for-word recreation of the text. There is definite value in her advice, considering that each playwright also has a distinct style and voice,

and writers should never become so enveloped in the source material that they lose the elements that make their work distinct.

If your interest is in adapting older works, much can be learned from Dean Emeritus at Virginia Commonwealth University's School of Theatre, Richard Toscan. In his seminars on playwriting, Toscan recommends four different steps to bring older source material into the modern age. First and foremost, he advises playwrights to use their own voice when creating dialogue for the new work. Often, the dialogue selected in older plays contains words and phrases that are so outdated that modern audiences struggle with comprehension of the piece. This would be a challenge for any actor learning lines, but especially so if your actors and audiences are comprised of young people. Toscan also advises playwrights to select a work of literature that contains a theme which is still relevant to today's audiences. Audiences need to be able to connect with what they are seeing on stage, and if they lack those personal connections, you will struggle to keep their interest, even with the most well-written play. James Zager, playwright and associate professor at Carroll University, has tried his hand several times at adapting works by William Shakespeare and Oscar Wilde. In *The Shakespeare Project*, Zager highlights some of the most famous scenes from the most popular Shakespeare plays. In order to reach his audience, Zager has found ways of modernizing these scenes so that middle and high school audiences are easily able to make connections to life today. For example, the soliloquy presented by Marc Antony in *Julius Caesar* is relayed to the audience as a press conference. The all-too-familiar balcony scene in *Romeo and Juliet* becomes a secret late-night phone call between the

two lovers, and Petruchio's attempt at winning over Katherine in *The Taming of the Shrew* turns into a physical wrestling match.

Lastly, Richard Toscan suggests making two major cuts to the script: reducing the number of characters, and reducing the length of the play. Here, we see once again how the old adage "tyranny of time" plays a role. For younger audiences, 30-45 minutes is sufficient. If your play is aimed at older audiences, such as middle school or high school, you can extend the length of your play, although Toscan proposes a ninety-minute performance maximum. Again, James Zager demonstrates this technique in his adaptation *Juliet*. The play focuses solely on scenes featuring young Juliet Capulet, which means that the remaining major scenes from the play have to be relayed to Juliet through the other characters she interacts with. By writing the famous tragedy in this way, Zager was able to create a shortened script of approximately sixty minutes that will keep the attention of middle and high school audiences alike.

With whichever method you choose to follow in creating your own adaptation, the most important thing is to always keep the young people as the focus of your work. David Wood recounts seeing a pantomime at the New Theatre while attending college in Oxford, England that had a lasting impact on him—albeit for all of the wrong reasons. He writes,

I noticed the storyline was very thin... The children were often restless.

After the story had rather perfunctorily been disposed of, the star comedian embarked upon his half hour obligatory spot... At one point, he cracked a slightly blue joke. The children didn't understand it... The star walked eagerly down to the footlights, leant over and said, 'Oh, come on,

let's get the kids out of here and then we can get started!'... How on earth, I thought, can this man, who is being paid a lot of money to entertain these children, blatantly tell us that he would rather be entertaining his late night cabaret audience. Surely those children deserved better (Wood, xiv).

The incident was enough to become a turning point for Wood, who recognized that there was a definite lack of quality theatre productions being aimed directly at children. Along with John Gould, David Wood would later go on to found Whirligig Theatre in London. Certainly, the field of Theatre for Young Audiences benefitted from Wood's negative experience in that he would end up writing some of the most beloved adaptations for children, such as *Babe, the Sheep-Pig*—based off of the Dick King-Smith book—and many of Roald Dahl's classics, including *The BFG*, *Fantastic Mr. Fox*, and *James and the Giant Peach*. Our goal as theatre educators is to create meaningful works for young people that will inspire, invigorate, and challenge them. It is vital for TYA playwrights to keep these things in mind as they write.

Knowing that I wanted to avoid any issues with procuring the rights to a story, I first set out to adapt a work that was already in public domain. The goal for my adaptation was to create a play with minimal characters so that it could possibly be used in the future as a TYA touring production. Fables seemed like an easy way to accomplish both of these tasks, so I set about researching some of the fables I loved and remembered from my own childhood. As you might imagine, the most memorable fables from my youth are also the most popular fables taught in schools, so my research ended up producing a handful of adaptations that had already been written. Richard Toscan advised against selected works that were "hastily adapted, as a recent "translation of an older play or novel may still be protected by copyright even if the original work was published centuries earlier and is not itself protected" (Toscan, *Playwriting Seminars 2.0*).

Chapter 4

Experience with Writing an Adaptation

I recently found a vintage 1947 edition of *Aesop's Fables* that I had never read. In the book, there was a fable that captured my attention, despite the fact that I had never heard of it previously.

The Eagle, the Wildcat, and the Sow tells the story of three woodland animals who have decided to make their home and raise their young in and around an old oak tree within a large wood. The trio of creatures live happily in their new home, until the wildcat begins gossiping to the eagle and the sow. She leads the two to believe that their young ones are in danger, and convinces them to avoid leaving home so as to protect their babies from the other animals in the oak tree. When the wildcat sneaks off to gather food for her own kitten, she becomes ensnared in a hunter's trap, while the sow and the eagle make the decision to care for the abandoned kitten, thus creating a

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The Eagle, the Wildcat, and the Sow tells the story of three woodland animals who have decided to make their home and raise their young in and around an old oak tree within a large wood. The trio of creatures live happily in their new home, until the wildcat begins gossiping to the eagle and the sow. She leads the two to believe that their young ones are in danger, and convinces them to avoid leaving home so as to protect their babies from the other animals in the oak tree. When the wildcat sneaks off to gather food for her own kitten, she becomes ensnared in a hunter’s trap, while the sow and the eagle make the decision to care for the abandoned kitten, thus creating a

reunion of the woodland creatures. The full text of this particular fable can be found in Appendix A; the adapted script, entitled *The Tree of Aesop*, is located in Appendix B.

Some theatre critics are very opinionated on plays that contain an overall moral. Many of these opinions are connected to the notion that young audiences reject plays that are openly didactic in nature. In much the same way that the United States' Drug Abuse Resistance Education (or D.A.R.E.) program failed to work, plays that are overtly educational in nature often fail to connect with children. In this particular case, I was not terribly concerned with the didactic qualities of the original fable because I felt that I could highlight some of the issues associated with verbal bullying, such as gossip and alienation, and present the material in a way that was not excessively blatant in nature. Early elementary students do not always understand that bullying can take various forms, including non-physical abuse. Producing this play would allow teachers to incorporate lessons on bullying and empathy. It lends itself to a cornucopia of character-based, "What Would You Do?" lessons and discussions for classroom use. As a teaching artist, it is important to me that the young people in the audience are able to make personal connections to the work they see on stage. As silly and light-hearted as my adaptation is, there is plenty of room to expand upon the very serious topic it covers.

The story, in its entirety, is less than twenty sentences long. I understood that a considerable bit of imagination would be required in order to expand the story into a 30 to 45 minute play, but I felt ready to take on the challenge. It seemed to me, that if I was able to take something so short and expand it into a one-act play, that any future adaptations would be effortless in comparison. Borrowing a technique from David Wood, I first wrote out all of the major plot points from the original story. I actively looked

for areas which I felt could be expanded upon, such as the beginning scene, where we are introduced to each of the three characters and are able to see them as they begin their search for a perfect home to raise their young. Once I had completed this task, I was left with seven major plot points to use as a springboard for my writing. From there, my approach became slightly mathematical. I calculated how long each of these seven sections would need to be in order to achieve the goal of writing a 45-minute play. Although I did not force myself to make each section the exact same length of time, it did enable me to have a goal which I could work toward. The resulting script features varying lengths for the seven sections, in addition to a prologue and epilogue.

For me, it was important to have some element of music, and I liked the idea of song being used as both exposition and epilogue. In the prologue, the actors provide descriptions of the characters as they are introduced to the audience one by one:

Come, sit down at Aesop's tree.
There's a seat for you and one for me.
The tales are true as true can be,
If you listen closely and if you believe.
Now, deep in the forest, there lives a sow,
With her curly tail and her piggy snout.
She waddles over and then sits down.
We welcome you with a great big bow.
(refrain)

Way above the forest, an eagle flies,
With her feathered tail and her beady eyes.
She swoops through the air and lands nearby.
We welcome her by waving hi.

(refrain)

Now last of the forest, the wildcat queen.
She's very tough and she's very mean.
She prowls through the leaves of the forest green.
We welcome her, nodding pleasantly.

(refrain)

From the start, the audience is pulled into the world of fantasy through the use of music. The tune of the song used in the epilogue is the same as that of the prologue, although the lyrics are different:

Now you've heard the story of Aesop's tree
But we have to ask, did you listen closely?
The tales are true as true can be
Now let's say goodbye to the critters three.

Underneath the oak, there lives a sow
Beneath the branches and beneath the bough
Look how far she has come now.
She learned to forgive, and she'll teach you how.

(refrain)

Way above the forest, an eagle flies,
She answered the call of the kitten's cries
And bravely put all her fears aside.
Her kindness left the cat tongue-tied!

(refrain)

Now last of the forest, the wildcat queen.

Caught in a trap and couldn't get free,

Til she offered the others her apology.

Now she lives with them in harmony

(refrain)

Here, there were two goals: provide a summary or review of what the young people have just seen presented on stage, and use a familiar tune to provide an auditory cue to the audience that the story has ended and they will be returning back to the world from whence they came.

From the beginning, one change that I knew I wanted to make to the original story was the ending. As written, the fable ends thusly:

It is possible that both families would have starved to death had not the wildcat made the mistake of getting caught in a hunter's snare, and the sow and the eagle became reunited in caring for the abandoned kittens (Aesop, 63).

Personally, I felt the ending was a little too abrupt. I wanted the focus to be on forgiveness, and I felt that the wildcat character needed a moment of redemption, where she was able to recognize the effects of the trouble she had caused, and make a conscious choice to rise above her propensity for greed. As is common with Aesop's fables, there is typically a clear "winner" and a "loser" in each story, which is what helps give the fables a moralistic lesson. I knew I didn't want the wildcat in my adaptation to experience mortality, but I didn't want the decision to evade death to have an impact on the "winner" of the story. As a result, I wrote an ending where the wildcat returns after the sow and eagle have bonded over caring for the abandoned kitten. The wildcat, at

first, believes her kitten to be missing or captured, but upon discovering the other animals have demonstrated forgiveness in caring for her young one, the wildcat promises to resist the urge to gossip and cause conflict in the future. The eagle and sow agree, but under the condition that the wildcat does all of the hunting for them in the future:

WILDCAT: Oh! My kitten! I thought I'd lost you forever. Oh, I'm so sorry. I'm sorry for everything! I promise, no matter, what, I will never try to tear us apart. You have cared for my young one despite the way I treated you both. How can I ever repay your kindness?

EAGLE: Well... I have a few ideas...

(All climb into the tree in their respective homes. AESOP comes from out of the background to end the story.)

AESOP: The three mothers moved back into the old, oak tree. They made a deal with Wildcat. Now she brings the food to the three, and they all enjoy dinner together—one big, happy, strange animal family. And that, my friends, is the story of my old, old, oak tree.

With this slight adjustment, I felt that the story still allowed the sow and eagle to be the “winners” of the story, while the wildcat, who becomes a servant to the other two, remains the “loser” of the fable but without the morbidity of the original tale.

This type of change is similar to one made by British theatre company Kneehigh in their adaptation of Hans Christian Andersen’s *The Red Shoes*. According to

Kneehigh director Emma Rice, when you “treat the source as a story, not as a text, the landscape of choices gently alters” (qtd. in Babbage, 2). In the original, an orphan girl wears a pair of red shoes to church although the community disapproves of such a ~~wrong~~ choice. The shoes are taken from her, but she manages to steal them back. When she tries them on, she is unable to take them off again, and the magical shoes force her to dance without stopping. An executioner cuts off the orphan’s enchanted feet and replaces them with a carved wooden set. When she returns to church, the door is locked, and her severed feet, still in the red shoes, dance jeeringly. An angel shows the orphan mercy, but she is so overcome by happiness that her small heart explodes and she dies. ~~the issue. I don't think that the original ending is alive during~~

This condemning and moralistic ending did not appeal to Kneehigh. In their adaptation, the ending is changed so that the orphan, rather than allowing her soul to go to heaven with the angel, decides to take charge of her situation, eventually beating the angel in what the play’s stage directions describe as a “vicious fight.” As Frances Babbage explains, ~~out of the source material with that a genuine fight was never~~

Kneehigh’s decision to change the ending in this way is instantly comprehensible, given the dated moralizing [sic] of Andersen’s original; and, as already argued, the idea that storytellers should make a tale their own is both a right and a responsibility actively embraced by the company in their work (Babbage, 9).

For me, the desire to change the ending of *The Tree of Aesop* was less about the ~~theatrical, and the desire to make the story more accessible to a modern audience~~ moralistic structure and more about allowing the wildcat to experience redemption and forgiveness.

Not being much of a wilderness expert myself, I did a fair amount of research in order to learn more about the animals in the fable. I was able to learn much about their eating habits and the types of habitats they build for their young, information which was incredibly useful once I began to write. One concern I had was the proximity of the characters to one another. It seemed to me, even with some suspension of disbelief, that the characters lived too close to one another not to overhear each others' conversations. If the audience believes that the eagle could hear Wildcat's scheming, then surely there would be some vocal response from younger members of the audience. Luckily, my research on the animals provided me with an idea to work through this issue. I discovered that while eagles and wild sows are active during differing hours of the day, wildcats are active in conjunction with both of the other two animals. This became an education moment in the script, introducing new vocabulary (nocturnal, diurnal, crepuscular), and affording me an opportunity to write the opposing dialogues so that they occur when either the sow or the eagle is asleep.

One weakness of the source material was that a genuine motive was never established for wildcat to begin gossiping. The original story states, "For some time all three families lived peaceably in the old oak, until the wildcat took the notion to start gossiping about her neighbors" (Aesop, 61). It leaves Wildcat's intentions too wide open; does she gossip out of boredom, frustration, the desire to have some privacy, or some other reason? I made the decision to write the wildcat as an incredibly greedy, gluttonous character. When she sees the eagle and the sow arriving home with delicious morsels, she concocts a plan to trick her tree-mates into staying put so that

she is able to gather all of the tasty food her heart desires to indulge upon. Giving the wildcat a motive helps to strengthen the plot of the original story.

Making changes, no matter how necessary, to an original and well-known story does occasionally have its drawbacks when it comes to the audience's expectations. According to Deborah Wicks La Puma,

It's really hard for [audiences] not to have expectations, particularly if they love the story and that's why they've come. Our take on the story might be very different than the way they see it. So, I feel like as adaptors, a lot of times we're being reviewed not necessarily on our choices, but on how our choices are different than what the expectations of the people coming to see it are (qtd. in Van Kerckhove, 33).

I feel fairly confident in the choices I made in the adaptation of *The Eagle, the Wildcat, and the Sow*. The alterations were subtle, but much-needed. It benefits me too, that although Aesop is a popular name that will appeal to audiences, the fable selected is not the most well-known. Therefore, my adaptation has a lesser risk of leaving audience members with dampened expectations.

In writing your own adaptation, you will undoubtedly have to make some difficult decisions in regards to what you want to happen versus what the audience expects to see. It is a tricky thing to balance, but the best advice is to center your focus on the themes and outcomes you want to represent, and then guide your story towards those outcomes. After seeing Kneehigh's production of *The Red Shoes*, audiences left not with a sense of disappointment over the alterations to the original ending, but instead,

carried with them the same sense of empowerment that director Emma Rice created on stage. Pour your attention into the overall objective of the piece rather than the battle between audience and playwright, and you will create a much more cohesive story that audiences will not only enjoy, but that will leave them with some sort of takeaway as well.

Chapter 6 Conclusion

Critics and practitioners alike can agree that the demand for adaptations

historically has, and will, continue to be directly correlated to the state of the economy at that particular point in time. We also know that the opinions of practitioners in the field of Theatre for Young Audiences has shifted over the decades. Though there is an ~~undeniable~~ undeniably need for adapted plays due to educational demands and financial limitations, there can be definite artistic merit and literary value in writing adaptations. The beauty of writing plays based on stories that children are already familiar with is that the source material can also be molded to fit the needs of the community who sees it. Whether creating a multicultural Cinderella or reworking a fairytale to encourage the female protagonist to take charge of her unfortunate circumstances, the playwright has the opportunity to create viable works of theatre that

Chapter 5

Conclusion

change the opinions and stances associated with adapted plays by creating unique, innovative, and meaningful works that can hold their own against the most original of plays.

Still, no amount of research relating to the history and beliefs about adaptation can quite compare to the physical and mental process of actually writing an adaptation of your own. Additionally, writing a play and actually bringing it to fruition on stage is an even more wholesome experience for the writer. I had the privilege of exploring each of these processes during my graduate studies. What I learned overall from these experiences, and the general advice I would give to educators, teaching artists, and directors who want to begin adapting is: Be fearless, and just have fun with it.

Critics and practitioners alike can agree that the demand for adaptations ~~went to~~ historically has, and will, continue to be directly correlated to the state of the economy at that particular point in time. We also know that the opinions of professionals in the field of Theatre for Young Audiences has shifted over the decades. Though there is an ~~big~~ undeniable need for adapted plays due to educational demands and financial ~~big~~ limitations, there can be definite artistic, sentimental, and literary value in writing ~~big~~ adaptations. The beauty of writing plays based on stories that children are already familiar with is that the source material can often be molded to fit the needs of the ~~who~~ community who sees it. Whether creating a multicultural Cinderella or reworking a ~~the~~ fairytale to encourage the female protagonist to take charge of her unfortunate ~~unfortunate~~ circumstances, the playwright has the opportunity to create viable works of theatre that speak to audiences in new and fantastic ways. Using this research, adaptors can change the opinions and stigmas associated with adapted plays by creating unique, innovative, and meaningful works that can hold their own against the most original of ~~play~~ However, it's beginning playwright is nervous about writing his or her own song, plays. ~~It's always the option of altering the words to a popular tune that fits the mood of the play~~

Still, no amount of research relating to the history and beliefs about adaptation can quite compare to the physical and mental process of actually writing an adaptation of your own. Additionally, writing a play and actually bringing it to fruition on stage is an even more wholesome experience for the writer. I had the privilege of exploring each of these processes during my graduate studies. What I learned overall from these experiences, and the general advice I would give to educators, teaching artists, and directors who want to begin adapting is: Be fearless, and just have fun with it. ~~icks later~~

As I discussed in the previous chapter, I knew from the start that I would want to include music as an introduction and epilogue to the play. In fact, the prologue and epilogue songs were the first pieces I wrote for the script. However, my experience with music was somewhat limited, and my hesitation to include a song of my own creation is a good example of one of the biggest lessons I learned through this process. I was nervous, but I created the tune of the song in my head, and crossed my fingers that it would all work out. Thankfully, several of the actors who attended the audition had significant music abilities and, by some stroke of luck, I even happened to find one who could play the ukulele, as called for in the script. He was able to follow the lead of the tune I had created and create a melody that went along with the song. The fortunate thing about educators writing their own plays is that they are most likely already familiar with the skills and artistry of their students and can taper the script to highlight these talents.

However, if a beginning playwright is nervous about writing his or her own song, there is always the option of altering the words to a popular tune that fits the mood of the play. Some options for source material in public domain might be a barber shop ballad (“My Bonnie Lies over the Ocean”), patriotic songs (“Battle Hymn of the Republic”), folk songs (“She’ll Be Comin’ ‘Round the Mountain”) or spirituals (“Swing Low, Sweet Chariot”). This option would work particularly well for elementary students and would also provide an opportunity for them to research the history and original meaning or use of the song. Ultimately, if you want something to be a part of your play, go for it. Be fearless. Go ahead and write it in the script. Then, work out the kinks later.

There are a multitude of ways to creatively solve any challenge you invent for yourself. I do not think the environment for *The Tree of Aesop* could have been fully created if I had made the decision to cut the song simply because I was afraid to work out the music for it. The writing process is often intimidating, but it is necessary for the playwright to trust himself and his artistic instincts. You have all of the tools you need to begin writing, and it is only through belief in yourself and your passion for creating quality theatre that we can start overturning the stigma of adaptations.

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Needless to say, the mother eagle was worried. She was so disturbed that she did not dare to leave her nest to go in search of food. Meanwhile, the gossipy wildcat visited the sow.

This excerpt is from the 1947 edition of *Aesop's Fables*. The story presented here, titled "The Eagle, the Wildcat, and the Sow," was used as the source material for the adaptation I wrote and which is contained within Appendix B.

The Eagle, the Wildcat, and the Sow

An eagle chose the top branches of an old oak tree for her nest and hatched her young there. A wildcat had selected the hollow trunk of the same tree for her den where she would raise her little ones. And down among the roots of the old oak a sow had burrowed a hole where she planned to raise her piglets in some comfort.

For some time all three families lived peaceably in the old oak, until the wildcat took the notion to start gossiping about her neighbors.

"Neighbor," she whispered to the eagle, "as you know I have the highest respect for that old sow down below. But if she keeps rooting under this tree the whole thing will come crashing down someday. That's probably what she has in mind so she can feed our babies to her litter."

Needless to say, the mother eagle was worried. She was so disturbed that she did not dare to leave her nest to go in search of food. Meanwhile, the gossiping wildcat visited the sow.

"Mrs. Sow," she whispered, "I'm no gossip, as you know, but if I were you, I wouldn't leave home today. I overheard that eagles upstairs telling her children they were going to have pork for supper."

The Tree of Aesop

So the eagle stayed in her nest and the sow remained with her little pigs. But the wildcat sneaked off every night and got all the food for her kittens, while her neighbors lived in distrust of each other.

It is possible that both families would have starved to death had not the wildcat made the mistake of getting caught in a hunter's snare, and the sow and the eagle became reunited in caring for the abandoned kittens.

Application: Gossips are to be seen and not heard.

Setting: the forest. An old oak tree, a patch of moss, and a medium-sized rock are visible.

The play opens with all of the actors on stage. They sing the following song while playing various instruments (drum, tambourine, maracas, etc. Maybe even a guitar or ukulele.) As each character is introduced, the walk downstage to greet AESOP, who is the narrator in this play. They should not sing the verse about themselves.

PROLOGUE

All sing:

Come, sit down at Aesop's tree,
There's a seat for you and one for me.
The tales are true as true can be,
If you listen closely and if you believe.

Now, deep in the forest, there lives a sow,
With her curly tail and her piggy snout.
She waddles over and then sits down.
We welcome you with a great big bow.

The Tree of Aesop

She swoops A play for young people by Laura Ashley Butler

CHARACTERS

Aesop/Narrator (M) Stern and sarcastic, but friendly. Wears a patchwork tunic and beard, and carries a staff.

Wildcat (F) A picky, prissy cat with an overinflated sense of self-worth and elitist attitude. Wears a fur to indicate she is a wildcat.

Eagle (F) A patriotic bird who loves classic rock and roll. The bill of her trucker hat forms the beak. She wears a band shirt with cutoff sleeves and slim fitting pants.

Passionate, but not very bright... (think Wayne's World)

Sow (F) A feral hog from Texas. Accent and overalls. Not a redneck, but definitely has a big Texas attitude and the hair to match.

Setting: the forest. An old oak tree, a patch of moss, and a medium-sized rock are visible.

The play opens with all of the actors on stage. They sing the following song while playing various instruments (drum, tambourine, maracas, etc. Maybe even a guitar or ukulele.) As each character is introduced, she walks downstage to greet AESOP, who is the narrator in this play. They should not sing the verse about themselves.

AESOP: AESOP has big ears. PROLOGUE
All sing: 'round, gather 'round. Come here, for you did come to hear my story, didn't
you? (pause.) Ah. That's what I thought. Now, I must warn you before I
Come, sit down at Aesop's tree.
There's a seat for you and one for me.
The tales are true as true can be,
If you listen closely and if you believe.

Now, deep in the forest, there lives a sow,

With her curly tail and her piggy snout.

She waddles over and then sits down.

We welcome you with a great big bow.

(refrain)

AESOP: One morning I sat down on the bank of a river and saw coming
EAGLE: Way above the forest, an eagle flies,
With her feathered tail and her beady eyes.
She swoops through the air and lands nearby.
We welcome her by waving hi.

(refrain)

AESOP: Now last of the forest, the wildcat queen.
She's very tough and she's very mean.
She prowls through the leaves of the forest green.
We welcome her, nodding pleasantly.

(refrain x2)

At the end of the song all smile and laugh together, exchanging glances. They pause and there is a bit of silence that lasts just a moment too long. AESOP becomes stern and shakes his instrument (preferably a tambourine or similar) at them with a meaningless sound ("YAH!" or so). This scares the animals away and they run off stage.

I.

AESOP: (AESOP has big gestures and overacts the entire monologue.) Gather 'round, gather 'round! Don't be shy! You did come to hear my story, didn't you? (pause.) Ah. That's what I thought. Now, I must warn you before I start—not all stories have a happy ending. My stories exist to teach people a lesson—people just like you! And this story... this story is a *true* story. (beat.) I can see you don't believe me. Very well. After all, I am a mere story-teller, so why should you care? But, I will tell you this... Many people have heard my stories and refused to take heed of their meaning. Those people, in time, come to regret that decision. (drifts off in thought.) Ah! But! Something tells me you just might be different... (with a look of mischief in his eye) So then. Let us begin!

Though AESOP is present in the next scenes, and makes multiple attempts to interact with the other animals in the forest, it is as if he is invisible to them. They do not hear or see him, even if he stands in plain sight of them.

AESOP: One morning, high above the forest, a mother eagle was soaring...

(Enter EAGLE "flying")

EAGLE: Spring is nearly here! I must find the perfect place to lay my eggs.

AESOP: (Under his breath) How about in that old, oak tree?

EAGLE: (Examines the ground.) Hm. This patch of moss looks nice and soft! But it's far too close to the ground. Suppose some big animal came trotting by! He would squish my precious egg to pieces! How awful! No, a mossy patch is not the right place for an eagle's nest.

AESOP: (Slightly louder, and gesturing) How about in that old, oak tree?

EAGLE: I know! How about on top of this rock? (Moves toward rock and examines it.) Well, it's definitely higher up, but it's not very soft.

AESOP: (Gesturing exasperatedly toward the tree.)

EAGLE: Aha! I've got it! How about this old, oak tree? (AESOP responds with an exasperated eye roll, smacking his forehead, etc.) Yes! The top branches are very high up, and the leaves will make a nice, soft place to build my nest. Yes, this is the perfect place to build my home. Tubular!

AESOP: So, the Eagle made her home in the top of the tree, and it wasn't long before her precious, tiny hatchling made his way into the world. (EAGLE reveals Eaglet puppet and interacts with him.) Some time later, a sow came waddling through the wood.

SOW: It's not long now until my little piglet arrives! I need to find the perfect place to build my farrowing nest and raise my young one.

AESOP: (casually) How about that old oak tree?

SOW: Gee, that sure is one beautiful, old, oak tree. (AESOP has an arrogant, confident look about himself.) But a pig cannot possibly climb that high. No, I'll need to look somewhere else. (AESOP, flustered, attempts to point out the soft ground beneath the tree. When SOW fails to notice him, he gives up. SOW walks over to mossy patch.) This area here is nice and shaded, but ugh! Look at this awful green moss! If I dig it up, it will just grow back. I'll have to look somewhere else.

AESOP: How about under that old oak tree?

SOW: OH! This rock! What a fine place to build my farrowing nest. Look, I can even rub up against it when my back gets all itchy. (SOW plops in front of the rock and shimmies her shoulders as if scratching her back against the rock. She quickly jumps back up.) YOWZA! That rock is way too rough! Why, I nearly made pork rinds of myself!

AESOP: *(picking at his fingernails, looking thoroughly uninterested.)* Should have tried the old, oak tree instead...

SOW: *(SOW backs away from the rock, rubbing her backside. She bumps into the oak tree.)* Hey! Watch it, you... you... *(SOW pauses. Leans against the tree again. Glances back at the tree. Leans against it again and begins her shoulder-scratching shimmy.)* Hey-ey-ey! This is nice!

AESOP: *(flatly, with sarcasm.)* Really?

SOW: I can build my farrowing nest down here in the ground. The tree will be a nice scratching post, and its branches will provide me and my young one with lots of shade.

AESOP: So, the Sow dug a hole in the soft earth, and surrounded it with small twigs and leaves to create her farrowing nest. Before she knew it, her piglet arrived, and the two were very happy in the shade of that old, old oak. *(Piglet puppet is revealed and SOW interacts with it.)*

AESOP: Some time passed, and a Wildcat happened to pass through the same area of the forest.

WILDCAT: *(sighing. Has an air of arrogance about her.)* Ah, I am so tired of walking through this wood. But, I must find the purrrr-fect place to call home. My young kitten will be here soon, and he deserves the very best! That's why I am going to make home—

AESOP: *(dryly)* Let me guess. You're going to try the rough rock over there, or maybe that mossy patch—

WILDCAT: —In this old, oak tree! *(AESOP throws up his hands as if to say, "I give up.")* Yes, this tree has a nice hollow in it. The hollow will protect my kitten from the rain and wind, and when he gets bigger, he can sharpen his claws on its thick bark. What a purrrrr-fect place to call home.

AESOP: So, the wildcat made her home in the hollow of the oak, and when her baby was born, she was as happy as could be. *(WILDCAT reveals kitten puppet and interacts with it.)*

II.

AESOP: The three mothers loved their young ones very much. They did what all good mothers do for their children. They read the babies bedtime stories....

SOW: *(deep voice)* Little pig, little pig, let me in! *(high-pitched voice)* Not by the hair of my chinny-chin-chin! *(deep voice)* Then I'll huff, and I'll puff, and I'll blow your house in! *(Piglet squeals and wiggles with glee.)*

AESOP: The mothers gave their babies baths to keep them clean...

WILDCAT: (*licks puppet and gags dramatically.*) *I must do something to stop her.*

AESOP: And they sang lullabies to them...

EAGLE: (*plays air guitar and sings with eyes closed*) 'Cause I'm as free as a bird now/ and this bird you cannot chay-e-aynge/Oh-oh-oh-oh/ And this bird you cannot change/ And this bird you cannot ch—

AESOP: AHEM. (*EAGLE looks away sheepishly.*) The mothers even provided the babies with a good education by teaching them how to hunt for food.

SOW: Now, my darling piglet, we are nocturnal animals. That means that we have to wait until the sun goes down before we can go out for dinner. Then we will feast on grass and mushrooms, roots and snails, and maybe, just maybe... ACORNS! Myyyyyyy favorite! (*Snorts and snuffles, spinning around and around with glee.*) Now, you wait here while I go gather our meal.

AESOP: Sow began to root around for something tasty to eat, and it wasn't long before she returned with lots of goodies. But, Sow was unaware that someone was busy watching her. (*WILDCAT watches the whole exchange. It should be noticeable to the audience but she should not leave the hollow of the tree. EAGLE sleeps through the whole scene.*)

WILDCAT: Mushrooms? Acorns? Blegh! That Sow has no sensible palate whatsoever. I wouldn't be caught dead eating such fil—(*sniffs*) Is... is that... It can't be! It is! Oh.... Escargot! How delicious! A treat truly fit for a queen. And that disgusting swine is gobbling it all up! I must do something. But what? I will have to come up with a plan.

AESOP: When the sun came up, it was time for Eagle to teacher her fledgling all about hunting.

EAGLE: Now, the most important thing to know about us eagles is that we like to hunt during the day and sleep all night. (*Voices EAGLET, who begins to sing...*)

EAGLET: I-I wanna rock and roll all night! And party every day!

EAGLE: No, no, no! We like to SLEEP every night and HUNT during the day. We are diurnal! Now, you stay here while I go find some frogs and fish. After all, it's the early bird who catches the worm!

AESOP: So Eagle went out to pick up dinner, but she didn't realize that someone was watching her, too.

(*EAGLE hunts and brings back frog and fish to her nest. Again, WILDCAT watches the scene, but doesn't leave her hollow.*)

WILDCAT: Now, there is a creature with some taste! Frog legs and caviar? Two of my favorite dishes! But why should that feathered freak get to enjoy the best

SOW: parts of the forest? I want it all to myself. I must do something to stop her. But what? I will have to come up with a plan.

AESOP: *Sow stretches and begins to wake. Eagle sleeps soundly in the tree branches. Wildcat checks to make sure that Eagle is asleep before climbing out from her hollow and sneaking over to Sow.* III.

AESOP: Wildcat didn't leave her hollow. Instead, she sat and thought, and thought and sat, until finally all that sitting and thinking brought about a sneaky plan. That evening, when the sun began to set...

WILDCAT: My precious darling kitten, it is time for your lesson! Now, you see that the sun is setting, yes? (*Kitten nods.*) My precious, you and I are the best of the best. We are crepuscular creatures; we have the best of both worlds. We hunt during the day, as the sun begins to rise, and we hunt again at night, when the sun starts to set. Last night, we watched that wretched pig bring home lots of tasty things to eat. And this morning, we watched that patriotic parrot-brain go out and return with frogs and fish. If we continue to let them eat these goodies, there will be less for us two! So, now, my precious, I will show you what makes a wildcat the superior ruler of the world. I am cunning and sneaky. I have the perfect plan. You just sit here and watch. Watch, and learn.

(*Sow stretches and begins to wake. Eagle sleeps soundly in the tree branches. Eagle does not hear the next exchange. Wildcat checks to make sure that Eagle is asleep before climbing out from her hollow and sneaking over to Sow*)

WILDCAT: Oh, Mrs. Sow! How are you this morning?

SOW: Oh! You startled me. What are you doing awake?

WILDCAT: Oh, Mrs. Sow. I have been up all day. I couldn't sleep after hearing what Eagle—oh, forgive me. I shouldn't have said anything.

SOW: What? What is it?

WILDCAT: Oh, it's nothing. It's just that Eagle... Well, I heard Eagle talking earlier, and she was telling her hatchling that she absolutely couldn't wait for you to fall asleep after your hunt. She's just waiting for the puuuuuu-fect time to swoop down and snatch up your little piggy dear. Then she's going to bring him back to her nest and gobble him up!

SOW: Really? You don't say! Oh, dear! I had no idea that eagles even liked to eat wild hogs like me!

WILDCAT: Oh, sure. Haven't you ever heard of pigs in a blanket? (*Giggles to herself, proud of her treachery.*)

SOW: (*snorts and squeals*) Oh, oh, dear.

WILDCAT: Yes, it is awful. If I were you, I wouldn't leave home again.

SOW: Yes, yes. I suppose you are right. I will stay right here and protect my baby.

AESOP: So Sow curled up next to her piglet and held him tight. Meanwhile, that tricky old cat snuck out of her tree and gathered up all the delicious snails that she could find. By the time she returned, the sun was rising, and Sow was fast asleep.

AESOP: *A day passes, and Eagle and Sow didn't leave their homes. Soon, a week had passed, and they were starting to get very, very hungry. But neither the eagle nor the sow had any idea that the other one snatched it from her deadly plan.* IV.

EAGLE: (stretching) Mmmm, what a stellar sunrise!

WILDCAT: Cock-a-doodle-doo! Good morning to you!

EAGLE: Oh! Mrs. Wildcat! What are you doing here? Shouldn't you be out gathering your morning meal? I always pass over you when you're heading home from a hunt.

WILDCAT: Yes, yes. Well, normally I would be out finding food, but I really needed to talk to you about something.

EAGLE: Oh? What is it?

WILDCAT: Well, you see... it's Sow. I overheard her last night talking to her piglet. She told him that she just couldn't wait for you to start teaching your young one how to fly.

EAGLE: Oh! Well, how sweet! I'm really excited too. You know, it won't be long before my hatchling becomes a nestling! And after that, it's just a short time later that he'll get his big feathers and become a little fledgling. And then he'll be flying sans parents! Oh, they do grow up so fast! He's just really smart and has excellent taste in music, and—

WILDCAT: No, no. You don't understand. Sow said she would be waiting on the ground, watching. You know, in case... in case maybe he didn't do so well on his first flight. She said—oh it's awful—she said that she hopes he falls! She said she'll be ready to gobble him up! She said she'd make a whole celebration of it... Turn the TV to the Arkansas football game—you know, her cousin's the mascot—and enjoy some *barbeque wings* while she watches the game!

AESOP: *Some of my sweet kitten if I'm not there to feed him!*

EAGLE: Can that be true? Why, I've always gotten along well with Sow. Surely you are mistaken.

WILDCAT: Oh, no. I heard it with my own two ears. Of course, you can always fly on down and ask her yourself, if—

EAGLE: No! No. That's quite alright. I think I'll just chill here with my eaglet. No hunting for me. Just stay right here and maybe listen to some music.

WILDCAT: Chyeah. That's probably for the best.

AESOP: So, when Eagle was occupied with her baby, Wildcat left her hollow and gathered up the fish and frogs that would've belonged to Eagle. She was proving to be quite the trickster, indeed.

WILDCAT: *(she has just returned from hunting. That's not been her at all I hope she's okay! Her poor little one. I haven't eaten in weeks. I know that poor kitten must be very hungry too. Maybe I should go there and keep him warm until his mother comes back.)*

AESOP: A day passed, and Eagle and Sow didn't leave their homes. Soon, a week had passed, and they were beginning to get very, very hungry. But neither was willing to abandon her baby and risk having the other one snatch it away. Wildcat, of course, profited wholeheartedly from her dastardly plan.

WILDCAT: Just look at all this delicious food! Snails and fish and frogs and more! Piles and piles of tasty treats. All for me! MMMMMMM!

AESOP: She ate and ate until her belly was full. Then, she ate some more!

WILDCAT: Hic! This is the best stuff I've—hic!—ever eaten! Hic! Oh, I just can't get enough. Hic! Hm. While my baby sleeps, I should go back out and—hic!—gather some more tasty morsels. I'll be back before he can—hic!—before he can say, "Aesop!"

AESOP: *(previously distracted by something on stage, he starts upon hearing his name.)* Yes? Oh. Ahem. Yes, so, Wildcat made her way back into the depths of the wood. But, she was beginning to feel as everyone feels after a big meal... she was starting to get a little bit *(yawns)* sleeeeeepy. Her full belly and tired brain were beginning to make her a little careless. She wasn't paying attention to her surroundings... a very unwise move in the heart of this particular forest.

WILDCAT: Oh! Ow-wow! What was that? Hey! Help me! I'm caught in a trap! *(HEEEEEEY! HELP! EAGLE and SOW are too far away to hear her cries.)* Somebody come get me out! Eagle, where are you, you good-for-nothing old crow! Come save me! Sow? Sow! Bring your smelly old tusks over here and pry me loose! Come on, you lazy pig! Oh, I knew I couldn't rely on you two! Ugh!

AESOP: Wildcat struggled and struggled with the trap, but no matter how much she tried, she couldn't manage to turn herself loose.

WILDCAT: Help! What will become of my sweet kitten if I'm not there to feed him! Ohhhh. *(sits down and sobs.)*

AESOP: Back in the old, oak tree, the kitten was starting to stir and wake. *(meowing sounds heard through the next part of the scene. AESOP becomes the kitten's puppeteer..)*

SOW: (stirs awake) Mrs. Wildcat? Mrs. Wildcat? CAAAAT! Wake up! Can't you hear your kitten calling?! It's keeping me awake! (hears no response. Glances upward towards the hollow.) Mrs. Wildcat? Oh... she hasn't returned from hunting. That's not like her at all! I hope she's okay! Her poor little one. I haven't eaten in weeks, I know that poor kitten must be hungry too. Maybe I should go up there and keep him warm until his mother gets back. But... if I leave my own nest, Eagle will surely swoop down and snatch my own baby from me. No, I need to stay here. (holds her baby tight. Kitten continues to mew.)

EAGLE: Man, oh man! That wildcat kitten's cries are really starting to give me a headache! Now, I'm not one to tell another parent how to do her job, but Mrs. Wildcat really shouldn't let him carry on like that! It's just not healthy. Babies need to know that they are loved! You have to answer when they call on you. Okay. I'll tell her. (clears throat.) Mrs. Wildcat? Mrs. Cat? I don't mean to impose, but maybe... (notices that WILDCAT is not in her hollow.) Oh, my! Where's Mrs. Wildcat? She just left her kitten all alone like that? That's just not good parenting! Poor thing. I bet he's starving! I'm pretty hungry myself. Maybe I could just go out and bring him a small little something to eat. Just until she gets back. Oh, but suppose I leave my own nest and my hatchling should try to fly all by himself? He is still so young; he would surely fall! And then that mean old Sow would eat him up! I should stay here, safe in my nest.

AESOP: The two stayed in their homes. The minutes passed, and they began to get more and more worried for the abandoned kitten. That's when the magic of the tree began to take form. First, they began to feel just a little more brave. Their hearts felt a little more full. And their ability to trust came back little by little.

EAGLE: Nor would I.

SOW: Nor would she say something like that. I really should help.

EAGLE: What if that was my

SOW: piglet, I really don't want to steal my piglet?

EAGLE: all alone and

SOW: But I? No way! If anything, I'd choose Tabasco over you. I'm afraid? I'm a should scared, I'm scared! Only kidding, I'm not scared. I can't tell from that I actually believed he was scared. I just need him to be a friend.

EAGLE: Bravery

SOW: I like you too. And I'm starving. What do you say we go for a walk? You can have a bite to eat while the kids play together.

EAGLE: That's so

I really should help.

What if that was my eaglet

I'm

afraid of Sow, but I must be

brave.

SOW: this This is it,
EAGLE: Here I go... Here I go...

(EAGLE flies down and circles the tree before landing at the hollow. SOW is a poor climber, but eventually makes it up to the hollow. They should arrive at the same time, one standing at either side of the tree. AESOP may play music during this part)

EAGLE: Mrs. Sow!
SOW: Mrs. Eagle!
TOGETHER: What at you doing here?
EAGLE: Please, don't hurt me. I'm only here to check on Wildcat's tiny kitten. I heard him mewing from way up in the top of the tree.
SOW: ~~CAT~~ Hurt you! Why, I should be afraid that you'll hurt me! I, too, heard the kitten's cries. Please, please, I beg you. Do not hurt me or my piglet baby. I am only here to help this poor abandoned little one.
EAGLE: Why on earth would I want to hurt you? You're the dangerous one! What even gave you the idea that I wanted to bring you harm? I'm just a bird! I don't have monstrous fangs like you!
SOW: They aren't fangs, they're tusks! And don't you try to pull the feathers over my eyes! Wildcat told me exactly what you said about wanting to turn my darling piglet into hors d'oeuvres!
EAGLE: What! That's preposterous! Mrs. Wildcat told me that you're hoping my hatchling falls from his nest so you can gobble him up!
SOW: That's ridiculous. I would never!
EAGLE: Nor would I!
SOW: ~~EAGLE~~ (dejectedly) Why would she say something like that about me? That's so horrible.
EAGLE: Why would she say it about me either?
SOW: So you really don't want to steal my piglet?
EAGLE: Of course not. And you really don't hope to turn my eaglet into barbecue wings?
SOW: Barbecue? No way! If anything, I'd choose Tabasco sauce.... (EAGLE shoots him a skeptical glance.) Kidding! Only kidding! Oh, I am so relieved. I can't fathom that I actually believed her lies! I'm sorry, Eagle. I've missed having you for a friend.
EAGLE: I've missed you, too. And I'm starving. What do you say we take this little kitten and our own young ones out for a walk? We can grab a bite to eat while the kids play together.

SOW: Really? Well, all right, I'll try it, I'll do it for you.

EAGLE: Of course! (SOW and walks over to WILDCAT, who is still crying) Mrs.

SOW: Okay!

(EAGLE and SOW scoop up kitten and gather their own babies before heading offstage. There should be an ease to the air; everyone is happy and giggling.)

SOW: (Walks forward, holding kitten) I think I have something of yours...

WILDCAT: Oh! My kitten! (Screams) I'm so sorry, I'm sorry, I'm sorry for... VII

AESOP: And that's exactly what they did. Now, while all of that was happening over at the old, oak tree, Wildcat had managed to free herself from the trap and was eagerly hurrying home.

WILDCAT: Oh, how thankful I am to be finally free! I hope my kitten is okay. Oh, how I have missed him so! (Arrives at tree and sees that it is empty.) Kitten! Kitten! Oh, no! Where is everyone? Where is my baby? Where is Eagle? Where is Sow! Oh, oh, oh! Why did I do this? This is all my fault. If I hadn't spread those lies, maybe none of this would have ever happened! I am being punished! (beat) I deserve to be punished. I've been completely awful. I tore my two friends apart. Now I have no friends. And my baby is gone. Oh, please, Aesop help me! Use the magic of your tree! Bring them back! Please, oh please! (WILDCAT hears no response. AESOP has faded into the background and cannot hear her cries.)

WILDCAT: Oh, oh. Not even Aesop can hear me. I am all alone. (WILDCAT sits down and begins to cry. As she sobs, EAGLE and SOW return from their walk slightly. They are laughing, while the animals looking out from the audience are crying, using the verse about themselves.)

EAGLE: Sow! Do you see that!

SOW: It's Wildcat!

EAGLE: She's returned!

SOW: Well, I don't care. If I had my druthers, I wish she'd stayed gone! She's purely awful for what she did to us.

EAGLE: Don't you see? Look, closely. She's crying! She shows remorse. She must feel terrible for lying to us.

SOW: Underneath the tree, I don't know. How can I believe anything after the lies she spread to us! She's probably just faking!

EAGLE: I don't think so. She doesn't see us. I think she really means it. Come on, Mrs. Sow. We should forgive her.

SOW: She is! I don't want to! (and she'll teach you how.)

EAGLE: Sow, everyone makes mistakes. I know you're still hurting, but sometimes the best way to heal is to forgive. I know you can do it.

SOW: Well... Well, all right. I'll try it. I'll do it for you.

EAGLE: *(Smiles to SOW and walks over to WILDCAT, who is still crying)* Mrs. Wildcat?

WILDCAT: *(Looking up.)* Huh? Who—EAGLE! It's you! I've never been so happy to see you. Oh, it's just awful, Eagle! I told all these lies, and now my baby is missing. I lied to you and I lied to Sow. And now I am all alone.

SOW: *(Walks forward, holding kitten)* I think I have something of yours....

WILDCAT: Oh! My kitten! I thought I'd lost you forever. Oh, I'm so sorry. I'm sorry for everything! I promise, no matter, what, I will never try to tear us apart. You have cared for my young one despite the way I treated you both. How can I ever repay your kindness?

EAGLE: Well... I have a few ideas...

(All climb into the tree in their respective homes. AESOP comes from out of the background to end the story.)

AESOP: The three mothers moved back into the old, oak tree. They made a deal with Wildcat. Now she brings the food to the three, and they all enjoy dinner together—one big, happy, strange animal family. And that, my friends, is the story of my old, old, oak tree.

EPILOGUE

(Tune of this song is the same as the entrance song, but the words have changed slightly. There should be similar blocking, with the animals exiting the tree to address the audience. Again, they should not sing the verse about themselves.)

ALL: Now you've heard the story of Aesop's tree
But we have to ask, did you listen closely?
The tales are true as true can be
Now let's say goodbye to the critters three.

Underneath the oak, there lives a sow
Beneath the branches and beneath the bough
Look how far she has come now
She learned to forgive, and she'll teach you how.

(refrain)

Way above the forest, an eagle flies,

She answered the call of the kitten's cries

And bravely put all her fears aside

Her kindness left the cat tongue-tied!

(refrain)

Now last of the forest, the wildcat queen.

Caught in a trap and couldn't get free.

Til she offered the others her apology

Now she lives with them in harmony

(refrain x2)

(As before, when the song ends, there is the laughter and awkward silence following. AESOP again lets out his made-up sound [“YAH!”] and the three animals run offstage. AESOP turns back toward the audience, winks, and grins slyly before heading offstage himself.)

*Data was culled from each organization's website.

END

Appendix C

Table 1.1

A Comparison of Current Children's Theatre Season Offerings

2017-2018 Season Shows			
Theatre Company	Number of Adaptations	Number of Original Works	Percentage of Adaptations
Children's Theatre Company	5	1	83%
Seattle Children's Theatre	5	1	83%
Lexington Children's Theatre	9	3	75%
The Rose Theater	7	1	88%
Children's Theatre of Charlotte	6	4	60%
Childsplay	7	0	100%
Metro Theatre Company	1	1	50%
Imagination Stage	4	1	80%
Oregon Children's Theater	4	1	80%
TOTALS	48	13	79%

*Data was pulled from each organization's website.

TYA ADAPTATIONS FOR THE THEATRE EDUCATOR

A THESIS SUBMITTED TO
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MASTER OF EDUCATION IN THEATRE EDUCATION

DEPARTMENT OF THEATRE

BY

LAURA ASHLEY BUTLER

2018

Brenda May Ito

Professor Brenda May Ito, Thesis Chair

Krystal Kennel

Professor Krystal Kennel

L. Dooley

Dr. Lawrence Dooley, Department Chair

5/14/2018

Date

